

Then and now

Historic fishing centre lands sustainable catch
in the form of economic diversity

By Quentin Casey



Rachel Bailey points to an old aerial photograph of her Nova Scotia hometown and notes the many changes. The photograph, from 1978, reveals a Lunenburg very different from the UNESCO World Heritage Site that exists today.

Most noticeable is the waterfront: completely dedicated to industry and closed to the public. There are no tourists strolling on wharves with ice cream cones in hand, as is common now in the summer months.

"I don't think I even went on the waterfront as a kid. The front harbour was off limits. It was industrial. It was dirty," says Bailey, who was elected as the town's mayor in 2012.

According to Bailey, the collapse of the Atlantic fishery forced Lunenburg to shift away from its traditional fish harvesting roots. "We had no choice but to reinvent our economy," she says.

Today the Lunenburg waterfront is a key part of the town's appeal as a tourist destination, helping to attract tens of thousands of visitors each year.

It's still a working waterfront, but one that is more friendly to onlookers. Adams & Knickle's red buildings help give a historic look to the area, yet the company still lands seafood on the waterfront. "People can go to the wharf and see scallops being unloaded. It's real stuff. It's not make-believe," Bailey says.

Lunenburg is also home to a level of industry and modern business that seems unjustified given its size: population 2,300.

Most notable is High Liner Foods, which started in 1899 as W.C. Smith & Company, a salt fish operation. Today, High Liner, whose head office remains in Lunenburg, boasts that it is North America's largest seller of frozen value-added

CELEBRATE SUCCESS



2015 NOVA SCOTIA EXPORT ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

WORLD TRADE AND CONVENTION CENTRE
HALIFAX • NOVA SCOTIA
THURSDAY, MAY 21, 2015

Join us for a full day dedicated to export. This year's event includes a Technical Briefing for experienced exporters on Canada-US Trade.

The awards and networking luncheon features keynote speaker Julia Rivard, Senior Partner at Norex Creative Web Strategies. The day concludes with an educational workshop on Going Global for new exporters.

TICKETS ON SALE NOW!

WWW.EXPORTACHIEVEMENTAWARDS.COM

PRESENTED BY



seafood. In Bailey's view, High Liner is a reflection of the larger community: a traditional company that has modernized to survive in the modern economy.

Perhaps the best example of Lunenburg's connection to the new economy is HB Studios, a video game producer that has made games for big distributors such as Konami, MLB.com, Atari, and Nintendo.

Melanie Wellard was working at High Liner in 2005 when she received an email alerting her to an HR job at HB Studios. The posting said the job was in Lunenburg, but after looking at photos of the company's modern, swanky office, Wellard concluded the company must be in Lunenburg, Germany.

"I thought: 'This can't be Lunenburg,'" she recalls. "I got in my car after work and came over here. I never knew this place existed. I didn't realize there were this many young people around." Wellard asked to look around and, even though she wasn't looking for a new job, applied.

Today the native of Deer Lake, Nfld. is the company's director of operations, and is married to its CEO and founder, Jeremy Wellard.

Jeremy Wellard, originally from the U.K., started HB Studios in 2000. The company's first video game was Cricket 2002, made for EA Sports. Early on, the company had fewer than 10 employees working in a storefront on Lincoln Street. Today the company has 80 employees, housed in a neatly decorated and dimly-lit office that includes a game testing room (with large white bean bag chairs) and a lunch room with a pool table and fireplace.

HB Studios has designed 46 games, which the company says have sold a combined 21 million copies. HB Studios recently self-published its first in-house creation, The Golf Club.

About 20 per cent of the company's workforce is drawn from outside Canada. It currently has seven employees on temporary work permits. Of its Canadian employees, about 20 are from the local area, including one of Mayor Bailey's sons. The average age of an HB Studios employee is slightly under 30.

Does a company in a rural town struggle to hire the younger, specially trained workers needed for video game engineering?

"I wouldn't say it's been a challenge," Wellard says. She notes the company

often attracts “fresh grads” – people with limited experience looking to break into the industry.

Many employees, she adds, are attracted by the potential to work in a creative industry, while also being able to afford a house and raise a family in a rural area.

Like the Wellards, neither Pierre Guevremont nor Lynne MacKay are originally from Lunenburg.

The couple chose to set up their business, the Ironworks Distillery, in the town for one specific reason: they found an old building perfectly suited to their project.

Guevremont was inspired to launch a craft distillery after reading an article in *enRoute* magazine. “I thought, ‘What a huge opportunity for Nova Scotia because no one is doing this here,’” he recalls.

At the time, the pair was living in Toronto. Following a real estate search, they settled on their distillery location: a Lunenburg building, constructed in 1893, which for many years housed a marine blacksmith’s shop. Its worn and uneven wooden floors hint at its former use.

“We fit this building exceedingly well,” Guevremont says. “That has helped the business and helped it become a destination of sorts.”

Started in 2009, the Ironworks Distillery uses a large still imported from Germany to make a variety of spirits and liqueurs. (“A wood-fired still didn’t faze anyone here, where it might have in an urban centre,” Guevremont notes.) Among the company’s products are three varieties of rum, apple vodka, and various liqueurs – all made from Nova Scotia fruit.

The company has gained quite a bit of attention for its pear brandy. For the past four years, the couple has placed a few hundred bottles in trees at a local orchard, allowing a pear to grow in each bottle. The bottles are later filled with the company’s pear brandy.

Guevremont recalls standing in the field, alongside a local farmer, while harvesting the pear-filled bottles from the trees. “He looked at it and said, ‘Pierre, you’ve turned a 10-cent pear into a \$100 bottle of booze.’”

For Guevremont that’s the key: adding value to a relatively simple, local product.

Adds MacKay: “It develops its own PR. We’ve done very little actual advertising because people are fascinated with it. That has been very beneficial.”

So is the couple pleased with its decision to base Ironworks in Lunenburg?



Your secrets are safe with us.

As Atlantic Canada’s leader in document destruction, we pride ourselves in providing innovative solutions for the collection and destruction of sensitive documents, records and products.

Call today to find out how Shred Guard can keep your information secure.



Toll-Free: 1-866-707-4733 www.shredguard.com



A better way to protect your documents.

File folders and boxes are convenient for active records that you need immediate access to but for long-term storage, they put your information at risk and take up valuable space.

You can depend on DocuGuard for confidential records storage, standard and rush deliveries, high-speed document scanning, and much more.



Toll-Free: 1-866-707-4733 www.docuguard.ca



"We've been growing 30-40 per cent every year," Guevremont reports. "We knew the fit was going to be a good one and so far it has been."

The Ironworks Distillery is part of Lunenburg's robust food and drink scene. For a town its size, Lunenburg boasts an impressive number of well-regarded, independent restaurants. And this summer saw newcomers enter the game, including Rime, Lincoln Street Food, and the South Shore Fish Shack, which often had a line of waiting customers stretching down the street.

"There are a lot of talented chefs in the area," says Adam Bower, the new owner of the Grand Banker Bar & Grill, a staple of the Lunenburg restaurant scene for the past two decades. "We're developing a reputation as a culinary destination."

Bower grew up in Lunenburg and in 1997, at age 19, started bussing tables at the Grand Banker. Within a few weeks he was a server and later worked his way up to assistant manager.

Bower, 36, went to Mount Saint Vincent University to study tourism and hospitality, and eventually worked in Alberta for five years with Fairmont Hotels & Resorts. More recently, he

served as food and beverage manager for Delta hotels in Halifax.

In October 2013, Bower received a call from Alan Creaser, the long-time owner of the Grand Banker. He was looking to sell and wanted to give his former employee the first opportunity to buy.

"My ultimate dream was always to own my own restaurant. But as everyone knows, it's a very high-risk industry. The success rate is sometimes scary," Bower says.

Despite the risk, he decided to buy the Grand Banker and its attached accommodations: the Brigantine Inn.

He took over last March and set out to make some "enhancements", including new menu items, craft beers and a wider selection of wines. (Bower is a sommelier).

He was also careful to not change too much. "I got people in town who wrote me and said, 'Don't touch the Acadian seafood stew' and 'You better not mess with my Blue Rocks fish cakes.' I knew what to keep on the menu but I knew where to take it," he says.

Bower reopened the Grand Banker on April 7. Two weeks later his first child, a daughter, Anna, was born.

"I'm not at all nervous and the

reason is because I had managed here before. I know my hometown. I know the community," he says. "I know what they're looking for."

Back at the mayor's office in the town hall, not far from the house where she grew up, Rachel Bailey is buoyed by the recent "influx of youth" in her hometown. Following years of decline, Lunenburg's population has levelled off, with town officials now optimistic about future growth. They are particularly encouraged by a recent, albeit small, increase in housing starts: roughly a dozen new single-family dwellings in both 2013 and 2014. In previous years it was typical to see only a couple of housing starts each year. Some years passed without a single new home being built.

"It's relative. It's not huge," she admits. "But there's a new excitement about the potential here."

"You can have it all in a small community like Lunenburg. It's nice to see that recognized in another generation." •

FEEDBACK

✉ dchafe@atlanticbusinessmagazine.com

🐦 @QuentinCasey; @AtlanticBus;

@ABM_Editor; #Lunenburg

Get  to 

No matter what – no matter where.

Get it there through the Port of Halifax:
reliably, effectively and efficiently.

Get it there.



HalifaxGetsItThere.ca | 902.426.2620